



Role Of Practicum In Prospective Teachers' Learning: Field Experiences In Teacher Education

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Abstract: Studies worldwide have shown the importance of teaching practicum in the learning of prospective teachers. However, this area has been overlooked in the context of Pakistan. This study takes a mixed-method approach and showcased prospective teachers' experience during their practicum in an undergraduate program in a university in Pakistan. Findings revealed that teaching practicum was seen as an important aspect of learning by the prospective teachers as the process provided the prospective teachers with an opportunity to put theories into practice. No difference was observed due to gender difference, as both genders rated almost the same. However, female prospective teachers felt that though the practicum provided them with opportunities to see their future roles as teachers; however, they were not sure whether or not their families would allow them to work. Findings have pertinent implications for teacher education in Pakistan and elsewhere in a similar context.

Key Words: Field experience, Practicum, Prospective teachers, Teacher learning,

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum is a key component of a teacher education program which allows the prospective teachers putting theories into practice (Becker et al., 2019; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000) and to learn from the firsthand field experiences (Farrell, 2008). Dewey (1938) advocated the importance of classroom experiences for prospective teachers in a teacher education program. According to him learning is reorganizing, reconstructing, and reforming one's own experiences. Thus, unless prospective teachers are in the real classroom, their teacher learning may not be effective. The real classroom practice is seen

important to put the prospective teachers' tacit knowledge into practice and develop knowledge about teaching (Shulman, 1986). The practicum experience provides the prospective teachers with relevant practical experiences in teaching (Ulvik & Smith, 2011). Studies have shown that practicum vary in terms of length, nature, structure and place in the overall teacher education program (Aspden, 2017). In Pakistan, teacher education has always remained a grey area in connection with research (Khan, 2011); therefore, there is a need to conduct research on various aspect of teacher education.

In this study, we aimed at capturing prospective teachers' practicum experiences in an undergrad program in Education. In connection with the real-life experience in the school, the prospective teachers were sent to various local schools for forty working days where they planned lessons and execute them in the real classroom scenarios. All the prospective teachers developed portfolios which contained the following components.

- Introduction of the school based on initial observations and interactions with the school management, teachers and students;
- Lessons plans;
- Reflections or reflective diaries; and
- Final report on the practicum experience.

The schools were selected based on the visit of a university faculty member, who was the course leader to supervise the practicum in the schools. The schools also appointed senior teachers (as mentors) to coordinate the work of the prospective teachers. The university faculty member visited the prospective teachers every week in the schools, observed their work and gave them qualitative feedback on their work. Besides, the university faculty member, the school-based mentor also provided constructive qualitative feedback to the prospective teachers before sending the prospective teachers to various schools, practicum seminar was conducted whereby giving practicum manual to the students and explaining their activities in the schools. According to the practicum manual developed by the department (Department of Educational Development 2018) the practicum exercise aimed at giving a practical and hands-on experience of teaching in the schools, put the theories into practice, reflect on overall experience of teaching in the schools, develop lesson plans and implement them in the classrooms and develop portfolios showcasing their learning as teachers.

Using a mixed methodology approach (Bryman 2004; Creswell 2003), we captured how the prospective teachersexperience the practicum in the field. Goh and Matthews (2011) suggest that "Teacher educators must recognize the issues of practicum students and have them addressed to lessen the anxiety felt by the students as they go out to learn the 'how' and 'what' to teach" (p. 20). Findings have pertinent implications for teacher education in Pakistan and elsewhere in a similar setting. Research on this particular area shows a bleak picture in the country. The aims were to explore how the prospective teachers experience the planning phase, the execution (classroom teaching), the collaboration and support, and above all, how they found the practicum experience for their learning as future teachers.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching practicum plays a pivotal role in teacher learning. The practicum experience enables prospective teacher practicing teaching in a real classroom and learns from their experience. Zeichner's (1996) work on teaching practicum provides the basic lenses for the study. According to him, practicum refers to "...all varieties of observational and teaching experiences in a pre-service teacher education program, field experience that precede professional education course work, early field experience which are tied to particular courses, and student teaching and internship experiences" (p. 123).

Zeichner used the term 'Educative Practicum', which according to him, engages prospective teachers in seeking answers related to teaching, classrooms, pupils, their roles as teachers and future experiences. He identifies three conceptions of practicum including apprenticeship practicum, applied science practicum, and the inquiry-oriented practicum. Among these three conception, the inquiry-orientation practicum is most preferred and idealized one that aims to develop reflective practitioners and tends to make teachers as researchers. Engaging in reflective practice (Berg & Smith, 2018; Goh & Matthews 2011) during the practicum plays an important role in the learning of the prospective teachers.

Reinforcing what Zeichner mentioned, Schuls (2005) also expresses that an educative focus practicum "provides teacher candidates with opportunities for inquiry, for trying and testing new ideas within collaborative relationships, and for talking about teaching and learning in new ways" (p. 148). The practicum experience also helps the students to know the classroom realities, students' individual care, understanding classroom management and experiencing the transition from prospective teachers to real classroom teachers (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Mtika, 2011).

In the discourses about teaching practicum, the school and university partnership is seen as an integral part of the process (Charisma & Nurmalasari, 2020; Cochran-Smith, 1991). Collaboration of the two, provides the prospective teachers with conducive and encouraging learning opportunity in the field. The university based senior teachers play key role in the prospective teachers' learning and development through providing them with relevant resources, constructive feedback and helping them reflect on their teaching practices. These senior teachers are called mentors (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Lawson et al., 2015) or Cooperating Teachers (Joseph & John, 2014). Joseph and John (2014) found that such cooperating teachers play a key role in supporting the learning of the prospective teachers during the practicum. Their study found that the cooperative teachers acted role models, mentors, coaches, and evaluators. The school-based mentors help the prospective teachers in the transition and navigation from the university classroom to the actual teaching settings in the schools (Joseph & Thomas, 2020; Lawson et al., 2015). Ulvik and Smith (2011) in their study found that a good practicum primarily depended on the relation of the prospective teacher with the school-based mentors.

Lawson et al. (2015) express that teacher educators prepare the prospective teachers for teaching through teaching them theories about teaching, learning, curriculum, assessment and strengthening their skills to teach in the classrooms; whereas, the school base mentors help the prospective teachers to practice their learning as teachers in the classrooms. They observed that the role of teacher educators was more ambiguous and needed more detailed deliberations. Similarly, the coordination between the university and

schools needed more attention and the use of various tools for assessment of the prospective teachers such their reflective journals needed much more attention, states Mckim and Velez (2017).

The nature of practicum is likely to affect the self-esteem of the prospective teachers. Dobbins (1996) found that their self-esteem fluctuated throughout the practicum, depending on the nature of individuals' strengths and energy level in managing and balancing the professional demands and support they received. In addition, the prospective teachers' self-esteem affected their teaching and ability to work with the children and collaborating with other teachers in the schools.

Exploring what makes a good practicum, Ulvik and Smith (2011) found that provision of a quality mentoring in terms of appropriate feedback, autonomy and responsibility given to the prospective teachers, giving a variety of experiences, prospective teachers' feeling of inclusion in the school culture, giving the opportunities to experience the detailed role of a teacher and having a structured practicum plan were the key aspects of a good practicum. Zeichner (2010) exerts that there has been a lack of connection between the university based and field experience due to the academic hierarchy; therefore, he suggests a nonhierarchical interaction between academic, practitioner and community expertise. Studies suggest that a good practicum takes the process beyond the classrooms' walls to the whole school as a community, and to the exploration of the community (Schulz, 2005). The aim is to develop prospective teachers as creative, reflective, vibrant, and dynamic individuals who are aware of the political, socio-economic, and educational values of their learning and practice.

Likewise, assessment of teaching practicum is seen as a complex and challenging exercise. Aspden (2017) argues that assessment of practicum plays a critical role in determining the student's' readiness to teach and achievement of expected graduate standards" (p. 128). The assessment of an individual prospective teacher depends on the subjective analysis of the assessors. Thus, the assessors' beliefs, knowledge of the subject, experience and expectation, likes and dislikes seem to influence the assessment of the individuals. Aspden (2017) found that there was lack of transparency in the expectations of the assessors, assessment criteria, in the judgment of the learning of the prospective teachers.

METHODOLOGICAL DECISIONS

This study employed a mix-method approach employing qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, analysis and write-up (Creswell, 2003). Studies show that researchers can employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study depending on the nature of the study, states Bryman (2004). Thus, in our study, use of both the approaches helped us to get perceptions of all the prospective teachers and further dig into the data to get deeper understanding of the experiences through in-depth interviews and document analysis. For the purpose of anonymity, the name of the institution is not mentioned anywhere in the text, deliberately.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

We collected quantitative data using a questionnaire having structured questions with a sample size of 51 (16 Males, 35 Female). The questionnaire contained two parts, that is, the first part was about demographic data of the research participants while the other part contained different number of items across four dimensions arising from the literature. The dimensions are:

- a. Practicum Arrangements and Logistics (PAL),
- b. Teaching and Learning (TL),
- c. Experience about Students and their Learning (ESAL), and
- d. Future Role as Teachers (FR).

We administered questionnaire to individual prospective teachers and requested them to respond to the questions while reflecting on their experiences of the practicum. For the analysis of the quantitative data, frequencies were run to explore the possible errors and out of range entries. The data was then, clean going through the questionnaires. After it, descriptive and non-parametric analysis was carried out using the SPSS as the data was not normally distributed. In a descriptive analysis mean and standard deviation was computed while Mann-Whitney 'U' test was used to know the differences between the groups.

QUALITATIVE DATA

We used semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions to generate qualitative data (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) for the study. We interviewed randomly selected 15 prospective teachers (10 females and 5 males). In addition, we also conducted FGDs (one with each of the groups). Likewise, the analysis of the written reflective journals, lesson plans, final portfolios, and teaching resources enabled us to get deeper understanding into the experience of the prospective teachers pertaining to the practicum. We then thematically analyzed the qualitative data. The qualitative findings enabled us to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under-study.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis have been arranged as i) Demographic Data and ii) Dimensions of the Practicum. The demographic data contains, gender of the respondents and program of the respondents. The dimensions of the practicum contain the four dimensions as, Practicum Arrangements and Logistics (PAL), Teaching and Learning (TL), Experience about School Students and their Learning (EASL), and Future Roles as Teacher (FR). The differences were also explored across gender. Table 01 presents the Gender of the Respondents.

Table 1: Gender of the Respondents

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Male | 16 | 31.4 | 31.4 |
| Female | 35 | 68.6 | 68.6 |
| Total | 51 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

It can be seen from Table 1 that most of the respondents were female (69%) as compared to male respondents (31%).

Findings pertaining to the four dimensions of the practicum, which were the focus of the study are presented in the sections below.

PRACTICUM ARRANGEMENTS AND LOGISTICS

We asked the respondents how much they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the arrangements of the practicum experiences. Findings related to the Practicum Arrangements and Logistics (PAL) are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Central tendency for Practicum Arrangements and Logistics (PAL)

| | PAL | PAL1 | PAL2 | PAL3 | PAL4 | PAL5 | PAL6 | PAL7 |
|----------------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| N | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 |
| Mean | 4.7568 | 5.4314 | 5.4000 | 4.8980 | 4.2745 | 3.8800 | 4.2157 | 5.2353 |
| Median | 4.8571 | 6.0000 | 5.0000 | 5.0000 | 5.0000 | 5.0000 | 5.0000 | 5.0000 |
| Mode | 4.71 ^a | 6.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 |
| Std. Deviation | .51587 | .70014 | .49487 | 1.0256 | 1.6009 | 1.8805 | 1.4044 | .83877 |

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

On average, the respondents of the study agreed that they were satisfied with the 'Practicum Arrangements and Logistics'. The results of the analysis across the four dimensions in Table 2 show that the majority of the respondents were somewhat agreed on receiving 'constructive feedback from the school-based teacher or Cooperating Teacher' (Mean = 4.3), the 'appropriateness of the duration of the practicum' (Mean = 4.2) and on 'manageable or doable plans and activities' of the practicum (Mean = 3.9). Similarly, most of the respondents agreed on the 'importance of orientation sessions about the practicum' (Mean = 5.4), 'relevancy of the given material and other handouts' (Mean = 5.4),

'cooperation of the school management' (Mean = 4.9) and 'timely support and feedback from the university supervisor' (Mean = 5.2).

In other words, all the respondents were satisfied with the arrangements and logistics made by the university in collaboration with the cooperating schools. Analysis of the documents also showed that the university supervisor had provided the prospective teachers with written qualitative feedback on the lesson plans and reflections of the prospective teachers. Similarly, the prospective teachers considered the duration of the practicum appropriate as they had enough time to plan, take feedback, improve the plan and execute the lessons. For instance, a perspective teacher mentioned, "being in the school for a longer period helped me to get to know the overall school culture, the students, and teaching and learning approaches". Another prospective teacher reflected, "the pre-practicum seminar helped us to greater extent to get a picture of our role in the school." It also surfaced from the reports developed by the practicum supervisor that prospective teachers were also oriented about the practicum during a pre-practicum seminar which was recorded as well.

Qualitative analysis of the data showed that some students faced challenges due to substituting other teachers' classes in the schools. In a Focused Group Discussion, prospective teachers mention, "The school management also asked us to substitute regular teachers in their absence. These created challenges for us implement our plans, reflect on them, and learn from the execution of the plans". This has implications for the negotiations with the schools.

TEACHING LEARNING

The second dimension in the questionnaire was Teaching and Learning. Table 3 represents the results pertaining to how the practicum experience helped the prospective teachers in their learning about teaching and learning. Table 3: showcases the Central Tendency of Teaching and Learning.

Table 3: Central Tendency of Teaching and Learning

| | TL | TL1 | TL2 | TL3 | TL4 | TL5 | TL6 | TL7 |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| N | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 |
| Mean | 5.4781 | 5.3469 | 5.3333 | 5.5686 | 5.6078 | 5.5098 | 5.2745 | 5.7647 |
| Median | 5.5714 | 5.0000 | 5.0000 | 6.0000 | 6.0000 | 6.0000 | 5.0000 | 6.0000 |
| Mode | 5.43 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 |
| Std. Deviation | .34694 | .56092 | .62183 | .64047 | .56845 | .61229 | .96080 | .47279 |

As shown in Table 3, majority of respondents (Mean = 5.48) agreed on the Teaching and Learning dimension of the questionnaire. The respondents strongly agreed on majority of the items, that is, realizing the need to 'prepare well for unforeseen situations and questions in the classrooms' (Mean = 5.6), 'practicum experience enabling enough to develop lesson plans and implement them in the classrooms' (Mean = 5.6), 'practicum experience as an opportunity to develop and use resources' (Mean = 5.5) and the realization of the practicum experience to 'make a teacher as a lifelong learner' (Mean = 5.8).

In other words, the respondents were satisfied on all the items they asked in the questionnaire pertaining to the whether the practicum experience helped them getting a picture of the teaching and learning. When classroom lessons were observed during the practicum, it was also found that the prospective teachers were prepared for the possible situations of the classrooms. For instance, the prospective teachers gave opportunities to students to ask question and responded to their questions and also engaged the students in collaborative learning through group work. Similarly, they developing low-cost and no-cost resources for their lessons as well. A prospective teacher reflected, "we had read and discussed several theories about teaching and learning in the university classrooms. The practicum experience gave us the opportunity to put those theories into practice and to learn from the practices". Another said, "this experience helped me to plan lessons, put them into practice, be ready and prepared for unforeseen situations and questions in the class. This very important for my learning as a teacher". Similarly, a third prospective teacher expressed, "I learnt that what a teacher plans may not work always in the classroom. Sometimes, a teacher has to change the plan as per the situations". "practicum experience helped me develop resources, use them and reserve them for future usage", said a prospective teacher.

Thus, the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data showed that the prospective teachers considered the role of the practicum in their learning about teaching and learning. Engaging in the real classroom teaching helped them to get an overall picture of various aspects of classroom teaching.

EXPERIENCE ABOUT STUDENTS AND THEIR LEARNING (EASL)

The third dimension of the questionnaire was about learning about the students and their learning. Table 4 represents the results of the analysis.

Table 4: Learning about Students and Their Learning

| | EASL | EASL1 | EASL2 | EASL3 | EASL4 | EASL5 |
|----------------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| N | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 |
| Mean | 5.4653 | 5.2745 | 5.5490 | 5.7600 | 5.3800 | 5.3529 |
| Median | 5.6000 | 5.0000 | 6.0000 | 6.0000 | 6.0000 | 5.0000 |
| Mode | 5.20 ^a | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 |
| Std. Deviation | .48371 | .85037 | .67272 | .68690 | .94524 | .82033 |

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

As reflected in Table 4, majority of respondents strongly agreed (Mean = 5.5) on having an overall satisfactory experience of practicum. They considered it a productive learning experience as teachers to see the importance of knowing their students in the classrooms and knowing how they learn. Across the five items of the dimensions, respondents agreed on getting realization from the practicum experience that ‘students have individual differences with respect to their learning’ (Mean = 5.3), ‘all the students have potential to learn’ (Mean = 5.4) and ‘student learn best in collaborative activities’ (Mean = 5.4) while respondents strongly agreed on the need to ‘care students individually’ (Mean = 5.5) and ‘students learn best when they are engaged in various activities’ (Mean = 5.8). In other words, respondents were of the view that the practicum experienced helped them in learning about the students in their classrooms.

The results extracted from the data of the classroom observations were in line with the prospective teachers’ responses against the questionnaire. For instance, it was observed during the lessons that the prospective teachers considered the individual differences in the classrooms. In doing so, they planned a variety of activities for the students involving, individual, pair and group work, and presentations. They had designed a variety of collaborative activities for the students while taking care of the individual strengths of the students. A prospective teacher said, “I knew from the university class that students are different from each other and they learn through different ways. Therefore, I plan my lessons considering that all the students in my class should have opportunities for learning”. Another prospective teacher reflected, “I observed that in my class there were different types of students; some were very shy, some hyperactive, and some responded differently to different situations. Therefore, my role as a teacher was to involve all the students in learning through considering individual differences”.

The important learning for the prospective teachers during the practicum included their realization that: a) students are difference and they learn differently; and b) teachers need to know their students and plan lessons considering students’ individual needs.

PREPARATION FOR FUTURE ROLE AS TEACHERS

We asked the respondents whether or not the practicum experience enabled them to see their future role as a teacher. Table 5 presents the results of the analysis of respondents’ future roles as teachers.

Table 5: Future Roles as Teachers

| | FR | FR1 | FR2 | FR3 | FR4 |
|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| N | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 |
| Mean | 5.3673 | 5.6078 | 5.2449 | 5.1765 | 5.4314 |

As evident from Table5, most of the respondents agreed (Mean = 5.4) that the practicum experience helped them to prepare themselves for their future role as teachers. According to item analysis, the respondents agreed that the practicum experience

'convinced them to become a teacher in future' (Mean = 5.3), the experience enabled them to 'realize the dynamics of teaching and learning in a school' (Mean = 5.2) and the experience enabled them to observe and experience the school realities. The respondents strongly agreed that the practicum experience enabled them to 'conceptualize their role as future teachers' (Mean = 5.6).

Analysis of the classroom observation reports developed by the University Supervisor also showed that the prospective teachers were improving their lessons each day after getting constructive feedback from the supervisor. These experiences helping them to become future teachers with relevant knowledge and skills for the schools. Qualitative data also showcased the participants' thinking of their role as future teachers. a participants said, "although, I had seen my teacher teaching during my schooling; yet, practicum experience in the real classroom situation enabled me to see my role as a future teacher". another mentioned, "I realized that in the rapidly changing world role of teacher becomes very challenging and we need to be ready to face and address those challenges".In short, the practicum experience during the courses, helped the respondents to develop their skills and prepare themselves as future teachers.

DIFFERENCES IN RESPONDENTS PERSPECTIVES ACROSS GENDER

The differences in the perspectives of respondents regarding the impact of practicum on their learning were also explored. As the data was not normally distributed, therefore, a non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney U-Test was employed to explore the differences across gender. Table 6 depicts the results.

Table 6: Differences in the Perspectives of Respondents with Respect to Gender

| | Gender | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|----------|--------|----|-----------|--------------|
| PAL | Male | 16 | 24.73 | 321.50 |
| | Female | 35 | 23.72 | 806.50 |
| | Total | 51 | | |
| Teaching | Male | 16 | 29.97 | 449.50 |
| | Female | 35 | 22.81 | 775.50 |
| | Total | 51 | | |
| EASL | Male | 16 | 25.03 | 400.50 |
| | Female | 35 | 24.98 | 824.50 |
| | Total | 51 | | |
| FR | Male | 16 | 23.84 | 381.50 |
| | Female | 35 | 25.56 | 843.50 |
| | Total | 51 | | |

As shown in Table6, the differences in the mean ranks across three dimensions of the practicum, including:Practicum Arrangements and Logistics (PAL);Teaching and Learning;and Experience about Students and their Learning (EASL) were favored by female

respondents. However, they were slightly not sure about their Future Roles as Teachers (FR). This was also evident from the qualitative data. For instance, a female prospective teacher mentioned, “the practicum helped me to experience how the actual teaching takes place in the classroom, how the students learn, and what is the importance of resources in teaching and learning”. Reflecting on the role of practicum in preparing the prospective teachers about their future role, a female student mentioned, “though the practicum provided me an insight into my future role as a teacher, yet I am not sure whether or not I would become a teacher in future. It depends on my family decision. For instance, I may not become a teacher if my future husband does not allow me to work”. In the patriarchal traditional society; the role of family becomes a key determining factor in connection with the selection of field and profession for girls.

To explore further the differences in the mean ranks of male and female respondents’ perspectives, two-sided p-values were also explored. Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7: Two-sided p-values

| | PAL | TL | EASL | FR |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 211.500 | 180.500 | 263.500 | 245.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | 806.500 | 775.500 | 824.500 | 381.500 |
| Z | -.227 | -1.640 | -.011 | -.404 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .820 | .101 | .991 | .686 |

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

According to Table 7, the p-values for all the four dimensions was greater than 0.05, that is PAL ($p = 0.82 > 0.05$), TL ($p = 0.1 > 0.05$), EASL ($p = 0.99 > 0.05$) and FR ($p = 0.69 > 0.05$). Hence there was no significant differences in the perspectives of respondents on practicum across gender. Briefly, respondents, irrespective of the gender, showed satisfaction with the practicum.

DISCUSSION

Teaching practicum generally aim to engages prospective teachers in seeking answers related to teaching, classrooms, pupils, their roles as teachers and future experiences (Zeichner, 1996). This study, while taking a mixed-method approach, aimed at capturing the experiences of the prospective teachers pertaining to their practicum in an undergrad teacher education program in a remote region in Pakistan. Through questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews and document reviews, we captured prospective teachers’ experiences about practicum arrangements and logistics; teaching and learning experiences; experience about students and their learning; and preemptions of their future roles as teachers.

The School-university partnership surfaced as an important aspect of the practicum. These findings reinforce those found by other researchers (Mtika, 2011). The selection of school by the university teacher, explaining rules and procedures to the school

management and Cooperative Teacher, providing the practicum manual to all the prospective teachers, and conducting workshop for the prospective teachers prior joining the schools were admired by all the prospective teachers. Findings showed that qualitative feedback (Furlong et al., 2000) given by the university teacher were considered helpful in the learning as a teacher.

It surfaced that the practicum experience provided the students with the opportunities to put theories into practice, engaged in a reflective practice, reflections on planning, teaching, students, overall schooling, and future role as teachers. Thus, such findings relate to what other researchers found in their studies(Goh & Matthews,2011).In addition, the practicum experience provided the student teachers getting an insight into the classroom teaching, knowing the students and getting a picture of the school realities (Tang, 2003).

As for as challenges for the prospective teachers during the practicum are concerned, substituting other teachers' classes seem to create challenges for the prospective teachers. The prospective teachers mentioned that the school management asked them to substitute others teachers in their absence. Thus, the additional unplanned activities in the schools during the practicum were seen as challenges (Mtika, 2011). In addition, some of the women prospective teachers thought that though through the practicum experience they got to see their role as teachers, yet they were not sure whether or not their families would allow them to work. This kind of feeling seems to be nested in the patriarchal societywhere the women cannot decide their career choices (Siddiqui, 2014). The male members of the society generally decide about the work of the female family members and that whether they should be allowed to work. This has pertinent implications for the teacher education programs in the country. For instance, besides career counselling for the prospective teachers it is vital to work with parents and communities so that they are able to facilitate the women of their families in their career decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching practicum was seen as an important aspect of teacher learning by the prospective teachers in the study. The process was felt to be instrumental to put theories into practice. The prospective teachers saw school-university relationship as a facilitating aspect of the process. No differences were observed due to gender difference, as both the gender rated almost the same. However, female prospective teachers felt that though the practicum provided them with opportunities to see their future roles as teachers; however, they were not sure whether or not their families would allow them to work. The findings also revealed the importance of planning for practicum, school selection, appointing school-based Cooperative Teacher and qualitative feedbacks given by the university teachers played a key role in the learning of the prospective teachers. Therefore, such practices need to be further strengthened and encouraged.

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